

D 524
.H55
Copy 1

THE IMPERIAL ONE

A LONDON WAIF'S
WAR DREAM

Joseph Merlin Hodson



THE IMPERIAL ONE

*A LONDON WAIF'S
WAR DREAM*

JOSEPH MERLIN HODSON

Published for the
NATIONAL WAR WORK COUNCIL OF
YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS,
by
ASSOCIATION PRESS
347 Madison Avenue, New York
1918
R. W. B.

1574
H55

COPYRIGHT, 1918, BY
THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF
YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS

1574
H55

DEC -2 1918
© CL A508342

The Imperial One

A LONDON WAIF'S WAR VISION

He pulled off his cap with an impulsive jerk, and bobbed a recognition to the officers of the enlistment bureau. It was a bit of the fag end of humanity who stood cap in hand offering himself, not knowing what he gave, nor to whom he gave it. The men in charge glanced at each other, and turned in their seats with a look of hopeless impatience. An insignificant runt of a cockney was coming forward. To that the pride of the British army was reduced. But they took him because they had to have him. They took him for what he measured and what he weighed in the hope that he might do.

A name was required and other information, but they could get nothing out of him that was satisfactory. He told them that he had always been called Bill. That was apparently all that he knew about it. Nor was there any record that he ever had been born, or of father or mother. He began the story of himself as he had it from the women of the East Side, but they stopped

him. It was of no use, so they called him William London, after the city. Thus for the first time he was written down a human being, and began to count for what there might be in him. The driving pressure for men and more men was ringing through the city and its appeal dredged to the bottom among those who had been rated as the waste of London.

The haphazard of what he had to give was a romance of the streets. Coster women who pushed their carts about would willingly stop to tell the story of Bill. They would begin with the day when Roamin' Sall "'ad 'im as a lump of a biby." The tale might very likely run to how for years she had made a living by sitting at Hyde Park Gate and other public places "with a biby in 'er arms when as we all knows 'er never 'ad one." At first apparently it had been by borrowing a baby as she could on shares of what she made. Then you might hear that Bill was a great mystery, for "'er would never tell." It might be told that she was beautiful to look at—very like the Madonna, and also that she was a great one to look after Bill. Thus the helpless years were passed until he was big enough to fend for himself along with the stray dogs and cats. When she died he didn't

very well know what it meant, but he soon came to be known "as the nipper as was not to be put upon." He disarmed many a blow and got many a bite to eat, and a place to sleep by his "knack of gittin' round any try, as yer may."

From the bottom he came a mere fag end of vagrancy, but he was soon herded into military order and discipline. There was in him, as in all of us, however, the mighty mystery, and much that was unexpected came out in the hard school of the training camps. With singular endurance he hardened into a soldier. From the first he had a way of infecting his company with the spirit of making the best of it. His courage and cockney humor helped to keep the men going in all kinds of weather. Often he would jolly his comrades out of their loneliness and their discouragement. Very soon the captain discovered the service he was rendering, and counted upon him in keeping the men up to their duty. Promotion was rapid in those hurrying days, but it never came to Bill. He was to the end a leader in the ranks.

The toll of the war went on, but there were few who foresaw that the time might come when the issue of battles would have to depend in a large degree upon the likes

of Bill. There was no military experience which would set much value upon his kind. But all tradition of the way that war should be waged was being trampled in the mud of retreating armies. It was a time when the raw souls of men were thrust forward for what they could stop, or what they might do. The discard of the race was being trained and rushed to the front. Men who had never known themselves to be men were born in a day. The courage which had been buried out of sight in sordid lives shouldered the rifle and fought with the bravest.

Thus it came about that Bill got to the trenches long before he was fully made into a soldier after the regulations. And of course it could not be expected that he would so quickly take on much of the conventions either of the army or of life in general. He was in a new world—translated.

There was one very distinctive thing about Bill. He had probably never heard that rather ugly word, "pragmatist," but that is what he really was, by some kind of native genius. If a thing worked he hung on to it, and never could be shaken out of it. He found that it worked to stick to something that he got from a street

preacher. The man was rather gifted in portrayal, and Bill followed him about in a sort of hypnotic state, until the thing became as real to him as the familiar streets and the people he knew. Somehow in his utter ignorance he gained an ideal, and it worked, so he held to it as animals hold to an instinct. From that time on he was no longer kicked about, for as it came to be said, "'E 'ad a wy with 'im."

When at last he got into the trenches he was precisely the same Bill, but with a new development. It wasn't all hell, for it could not quite be that where so much that was hearty and courageous was bound to break through, as the sun through the clouds.

One day he let himself go for the thing that was in him, and which he could no longer hold back.

"Eh, Pard! I'm for the King as I 'eard about. 'Im what's 'igh over all."

"Hush, Bill! They'll shoot you. Almost anything is treason now, don't you know?"

"Treason be blowed! I tells yer what I means. There 'as got to be 'Im. All this is no manner o' use."

They were up to their knees in mud and water. His pard was a Rhodes scholar, who had won his honors in one of the Canadian

cities of the far Northwest. The swirl of the war found him at Oxford, as he was settling down to make his way through those great halls of learning. Bill was a new kind for him, and he found him amusing, as well as startlingly shrewd sometimes. That idea of a King he understood quite well, but he couldn't rid himself of the feeling that it was not to be spoken of in that realistic way—it seemed to him a bit irreverent. But they accepted Bill for what he was and liked him. He really was what he called himself—"The Problem." In one of his moods he had once said, "Who'd a thought they could ever git us 'ere—us problems? But 'ere us is and we gives it to 'em same as any."

The men were very tolerant of what they called his "fancy," when Bill began to speak, as he often did of the One "as I sees plain."

But he kept at it until it seemed rather abnormal. In the end some kind of an official inquiry was made as to what he really meant. The idea got about that it was a trench mania bordering on insanity. It wasn't long before he was back in the lines cured of everything but his "fancy." They thought he was cured of that, for during the few days they had him under observation he slept away his excitement

and sank into such a reaction of physical comfort that it submerged. But he still often muttered something about "the new 'un." And he insisted that when all saw him, it would be different.

It is just possible that he was one of those crude agencies serving some such purpose in these days as did those ancient prophets who came out of the wilderness. There can be no question but his "fancy" won its way, and the men began to talk about it. They debated it, for the idea itself rather fell in with their feeling of something impending in these uncanny times.

Then Bill himself won upon them. He was, of course, out of his class with most of the men, but he was such a cheery, hopeful beggar, and so quick to help a comrade. They all knew that he was terribly underclass, and now and again one would resent it, but that kind of thing never made much headway. Bill had been having to do with the Coster bully from the time he was a babe, and it was a valuable schooling. His sense of humor, or his curiosity, often got him into the front row of a dangerous crowd, that he might see the letting down that he seemed to know the bully was bound to get. Ignorant as he was, he always

knew when anyone was trying to ride him down because of his class. That was the time when he was ready for battle. It was not on record that anyone had ever got the better of him in one of these contests, and he almost never made an enemy of his antagonist. When, as sometimes happened, a man who was in a bad humor would attempt to gratify himself by taking a fall out of Bill on account of what he might at that time call his religious views, the boys were sure to be on hand for the "circus." But these occasions always left them more convinced that he had hold of something whatever it might be.

A little later there came a night when Bill won distinction. And he won it by those very qualities which had made him a "problem" while hunting a living on the streets of London. That everlasting battle had sharpened him to a keenness which far exceeds all military discipline. He had become clever at creeping and dodging. Years of drill never could have trained him into a human ferret, for that is what he really was on this night when but for him the tide of battle might have changed at a critical time. He didn't know where Calais was, nor why the Germans wanted it. And being merely a "problem" he was perhaps

a little deficient as to strictly obeying orders.

It was a night when the war of the trenches was superseded by the war of the heavens. The storm was so violent that men could only hold their post fighting to endure it. But it was perhaps less to Bill than to others, because his mind worked under just such conditions. All his life he had been learning to fend for himself when the weather was bad.

Watching his chance, and without orders he slipped from the shelter and began to creep toward the enemy. He had been gone a long time but had not been missed when he tumbled into the trench as if shot from a cannon. Half a dozen bayonets would have quenched his story, had he not made a password of the name by which he was so well known. "The Problem—The Problem—'E ain't no German." This saved him and stayed the bayonets at his khaki suit. Then he quickly told his story.

In two minutes they believed him. In another the telephones were busy. While the heavens thundered and crashed the dispositions were made. When the historic rush came they were ready—terribly, awfully ready.

Bill never knew what happened except

as it was told to him afterward, when he found that he was still alive.

The fag end did his part, but he lay out on that battle-swept area for two unconceivable days and nights before they could get to him. Then for two weeks he was slowly passed along, the story of what he did and his bravery going with him. In time he was received into a well-ordered hospital with such special mention that he soon found it difficult to understand their kindness and skilful care of him.

They nursed his poor body back into the best that could be made of it, but when he finally got going, and felt quite at home he became a greater puzzle than he had been in the trenches. That mental picture of which he would talk became a matter of scientific interest. Of course the staff thought they knew, and learned discussion grew out of his case. Some thought it a very interesting case of auto-hypnotism. Others said it was a remarkable gift of visualization. It brought him under special observation. But the general instructions were that he was to be let have his way if he didn't get too excited. "Don't reason with him—quiet him—humor his views whatever they may be—poor fellow, he can't last long in any case."

But his sayings went all about the hospital. They were told in whispered conversations. The younger surgeons who thought they knew smiled when they were repeated, and then joined in the discussion with pretty and demure nurses. These angels of mercy were not so easily satisfied with a theory. They had sat with him, and somehow felt there was something to be explained. Perhaps, too, that quickness of intuition for which we give their sex credit came into play. In a military hospital there may be all moods of gaiety, or tenderness, or passion; but the great realities thrust up and stalk about. It must always be in a sort of half light of what is beyond. Thus for those of the nurses who were most frequently near Bill there were many questions. But his queer cockney dialect often had to be translated, and that was not easy.

He would break out abruptly sometimes with something that seemed merely to continue a sort of vision of his own, which he had made no effort to put into words. "The bloke says as 'ow they all falls down afore 'Im. Ain't that it now? All doin' the same. Kings and the like doin' the same as we, 'cause 'E's 'igh over all, then bein' different when they knows. Bly me, we needs it, after what I sees out there."

One day his nurse was trying to remove a dressing with very skilful gentleness, and seeing his control of himself smiled with perhaps more of the kindly feeling in her face than she knew. This moved Bill to say, "Us problems ain't worth it."

"Indeed you are! You did your part. Ours is only a little, but it is all we can do."

"That's 'ow as 'E gits 'igh over all now, ain't it?"

"I don't know, Bill, about that. What makes you think so?"

"Why, 'E's workin' in yer all the time. That's what."

"Oh, no! You must not say things like that. Don't say things like that, please. I'm like you—only a problem."

Then poor Bill had the nearest to a genuine laugh that his broken face would permit. There was an undertone in it of something of which he was very sure and that was satisfying. Thus he laughed as many of us would like to laugh if we could only find the way, and continued to laugh until his nurse was curious to know why.

"You must tell me, Bill."

"Why I keeps on laughing? Cos yer don't know you'se a hangel. 'E gits yer when yer smiles, an' when yer does for me."

"Oh, you are so patient—and so cheerful all the time."

"Problems 'as to be cheery. Us don't git much any time, no matter 'ow yer fixes it."

"But that King. You seem to think you see something, and I know whatever it is it makes things different with you."

"Sure I sees 'Im. 'E 'elps too. I knows that. Yer don't need ter know 'ow. Seems us can't find out. But yer lets 'Im an' 'E does it. Yer just looks an' sees, an' knows what 'E means. It's like when yer prays. Somethin' comes an' then yer gits up an' goes on an' does it."

"I wish I knew, Bill, but I don't."

"It's easy. I got it off a bloke out White-chapel wy. 'E says as 'ow when yer means ter try 'E comes along unsight an' unseen an' makes it so yer can do it. I fancy 'E 'elps any—them Boches, too, when they needs 'Im."

"Oh! I hate them."

"Not when they gits 'ere yer don't. They're the same when they needs fixin' up this a-way."

"That's true, Bill. We do take care of them, and they are very grateful for it, too."

"Sure! That's what I means. They're the same. 'E's 'igh over Boches same as

us. Them Blacks, too, from Ingy, I fancy, ain't 'E?"

"You are funny, Bill. I can't understand how you feel like that about the Germans after what they did to you."

Again the broken face was distorted as the laugh gurgled in his throat. It was some time before he was able to say, "You does what they needs. That's better'n knowin'."

"Who wouldn't, poor fellows? They are so pitiful and helpless."

"That's it! We all is for 'Im as sees plain what we're doin'. 'E sees us don't know 'ow it looks."

"We are all a blind lot—fighting the way we are, and all this patching up and suffering."

Bill was restless. When it came to thinking, his untaught mind was not equal to it. Besides, his nurse had led him on to a sort of explanation of what he meant, a thing which he had never attempted before so fully. He rarely went beyond a few phrases such as "I sees" or "I knows for sure."

What he saw was a mystery, but so also is that which a poet sees. It does seem possible, however, to believe there may be a great forgotten law by which some see—even babes—that which is obscured by our

conceit of the sufficiency of wisdom and prudence. Surely some of us have learned in these days that there is much that we do not see.

His nurse knew that he was suffering, and she kept her cooling hand on such parts of his face as she could find unbandaged. Quite naturally she thought he was suffering the pain of his wounds. Thus she remained with him, plying her kindly offices. She gave her smile and her soothing hand in service, and of course did not know how what she did might through Bill be transmuted and multiplied a thousand fold.

Presently he opened his eyes and smiled and said, "This 'ere's 'eaven now. I asks you that?"

"A sort of heaven, perhaps, but what makes you think so? You know we don't often call it that."

"I knows it's a manner o' speakin', but it's the same. You're doin' fer us now, ain't yer? Well, what's yer git outen it? Nothin! We needs fixin' an' yer does it."

"Yes, Bill. We are all glad to do it. Thousands of women—and great surgeons too—good and bad, great and humble."

"Not bad—never when they's doin' like this. I tells yer it's 'eaven when any does what's needed willin'."

"But you know, Bill, we are not good. We don't pretend to be."

"Pertendin' ain't it. Doin's most. That's what I calls 'eaven."

"Heaven is where we expect to go when we die, is it not?"

"That ain't what the bloke says—not by a lot it ain't. 'E says it's what's inside yer when yer does things."

"But I am not to argue with you, Bill. The doctors told me that." And the smile that went with the caution was the illumination of a quite common young woman, who was by no means beautiful. Nor was she conscious of it, except as one may be conscious of feeling kindness, and a wish to do just what ought to be done. She was working far beyond her ordinary strength, and yet never giving a reluctant service. Of the fact that her rather dull face could give cheer she had not thought. In her life before taking up this work there had been few smiles. The lines of her face were not those of cheer and good will. But now from cot to cot she went—an unaccustomed soothing in her hand—a considerate lightness in her step, and a smile often of which she did not know.

Poor Bill, "the problem," and she had something in common. He had never

counted as a human being. There had never been the chance to feel like one. His best memory was of finding some place from which he would not be driven out. In cold weather he was always cold. There had never been a feast in which he was quite free from hunger after it. The compelling instinct by which anything that is alive tries to live kept him alive. This was how he learned. The lightning flash of the street preacher had given him a picture—life, and perhaps the great artist had filled it out.

With all his limits he had a gift. When it was said that he was jolly and good-natured it was always felt that more should be said by those who knew him best. Many did try to express it in better terms, but to the end it remained baffling. His nature was apparently simple as a child's, and yet there was a mystery. Busy surgeons lingered to speak with him, and it is just possible that his cheer gave them a more supple command of their skill.

He sometimes called what he had to say, "goin' on." When they told him that he was a good patient his answer was, "There ain't no other way." Then again it was, "What's the good of bein' different?" He had no better thought of the situation than, "making the best of it." This he did so

consistently that few found the courage to make the worst of it, as we are all rather inclined to do sometimes for the indulgence of certain moods.

One day a nurse said to an eminent surgeon as they walked away from his cot, "He makes you feel different." The reply was not given quickly. Presently he nodded several times without speaking, and then said, "There is something about him quite unlike what you would expect from a patient of his class."

Thus as a human entity Bill lived. He who never before had been anything became interesting. There had been brought to the surface through his suffering a sort of subconscious refinement. This made him within his limits quite like our ideal of what a gentleman ought to be. But without any well-defined plan to do it, and without any more ability to know how to do it than a child would have, he helped others to visualize the great ideal of the ages. Day after day, and night after night, like a child he made a picture. He was a child. He receded more and more into the simplicity of a child. There he lay—one who had rendered a man's service in his awful hour—now serving as children do, who gently soften the hard outlines of the pictures men

carry home out of the battles of every day. It mattered not on which side of the cot one sat or was standing, for Bill's picture, if it came at all, was formed in the field of one's vision. More or less uniformly it was seen, often not very clearly; but when seen it was of One whose majesty no great master has yet been able to paint to the satisfaction of those who see for themselves. It seems always to have eluded the skill of the canvas, and of our poor words. From any picture other than one's own the reality of this ideal may forever pass. He who once came to us and gave it form often passed from the view of the crowd that he might live in their memory, and form in their vision.

This was now all that Bill had left out of his meager life. But it grew clearer and brighter. It shone for him by some light of its own.

The story of Bill got about, and traveled far beyond the hospital. An English writer of great distinction came to see him. Her introduction was of such influence that it could not be denied. With that touch of human nature which makes all the world akin she quickly won his heart. She also had the patience and insight to draw him out.

She said, "I heard about you in Paris, and you will let me talk with you, will you not?"

"I'm willin', Missis, if you takes me rough and ready."

"We are all proud of you. So many have heard of what you did."

"I ain't done nothin', Missis. Not me I ain't. I just went at it same as all. We all done best we could."

"But you didn't flinch when the time came. That is what we British like to feel. Always to be ready to do our part."

"Me? I 'ad to do it, Lidy. Us didn't see nothin' different."

"But you gave all you had."

"Some says that, Missis. 'Ere they says it. But me? I don't git back no way o' thinkin' about it. I fancy I only done same as 'Im."

"The same as whom?"

"'Im as what give 'Isself. That's what 'E done, now, ain't it?"

"I don't think I know quite what you mean."

"I means 'Im as what I 'eard about. A bloke out Whitechapel wy was 'ummin' steady about 'Im what give 'Isself, an 'E did it willin' for all."

"Surely you mean our Blessed Saviour."

"That's 'Im, Lidy. That's what I means, only that ain't 'ow as 'e said it. It's 'Im as give 'Isself 'cause 'E'd do.'

"And so you thought you ought to give yourself."

"Thinkin' ain't it, Lidy. Feelin' an' doin's more like it. At 'ome when I 'eard I git's to feelin'. Then I begins doin'—fer cats an' dogs first—lame ones and hungry when I finds 'em. After that, then, fer kids as needed—any. Soon I likes it better that wy—sort o' 'appy I was like—an' kep' on. Then I 'eard they 'ad to 'ave us problems. Then I gits to feelin' mebbe I'd do same as 'Im."

"And so that was how you came to enlist."

"When they says 'give yerself' it looks like it was the same. It 'ad to be done fer them as needed."

"For your country. That is how we all feel. Our country needs us and we will give all we have."

"Mebbe that's what made me do it. I don't know, Lidy, 'bout them things."

"Oh, yes! Your country called and you gave. That was a noble thing to do and we all honor you."

Bill was restless. Again he was trying to think. His visitor saw that he was un-

easy, and asked if she could do anything for him, or should call his nurse.

"No, I ain't wantin' anythin'. It ain't what yer thinks wy I went." And he shook his head vigorously, because in that way he could be more sure that he was making it plain that there was something wrong with what he wanted her to understand. "I don't want no 'onors er nothin'. When 'E gits yer, why, yer willin'. All is. Kings an' such would be."

It was difficult to find a place on the bandaged face where a hand could be laid. And words for even this distinguished lady of words became difficult. She took the exceedingly common hand which lay upon the sheet into both of hers, which were soft and expressive. What it meant for Bill was doubtless very much indeed. But for her it was the confession of her slowness and her littleness in realizing something of which she had long lost sight. She, too, now had the feeling of giving herself in a larger way, and with a greater willingness. The message which must forever, and for all, far transcend words had come to her clearly. The silence implied humility, of the kind that is our greatest exaltation—and perhaps for her the breathing within her of the Spirit Who reveals.

Two souls so differently housed had come together at the elevation where human littleness or greatness may not be measured. Poor Bill could not very clearly tell in words, but he had found a way to reveal to her who was gifted in telling. She was an artist in the use of words. What she received would make its own pictures, and tell with her gifts. It was quite as if the great artist spirit of the ages had found in the simplicity of Bill the least hindrance. That mighty pressure of truth, it may have been, which once seeking lodgment found fishermen, now found this waif—this stray—the most willing among us all.

She left Bill with few words nor did he need any. Her hands had spoken, and her silence. That was a language he could understand.

The change which was taking place in him was quite remarkable. His natural traits receded. The commonness perceptibly fell away. Whatever it was that was in him greater than his poor human limits gained a finer proportion. Something within him cast off its shackles and grew more clearly defined.

As he lingered there were indications from time to time that some sufficient purpose was making its way through him.

One day a group of patients was being discharged to make room for others coming in. They passed out carried—or limping in pain—others groping with sightless eyes to find their way through the years. Of course the halo of their great hour would fade. They would come to common days, and to common men and women—these fractions of men, and would have to hold their own with hard conditions. A surgeon who stood looking on was greatly moved and said, “May the Great God who leads some gently, and carries others, take care of these poor boys.” Then he added, as if not quite satisfied, “May they find the tenderness of a people over whom the Great King rules.”

Another surgeon who had been standing beside him asked as they walked away together, “What King, and where does he rule?”

The answer came quickly, “Bill’s King—Bill, the problem. You know about him—you have heard him go on, as he calls it?”

“Yes, but I have never thought much about him—too busy. A little wanting here,” tapping his forehead, “is he not? I have thought when at all of him as little more than a child.”

“A child in a way. But he was a man

in his loyalty to the call of his country. Then he was a man in courage in the battle lines—almost more than a man in the way that he met pain, and the cheeriest and jolliest patient among thousands. His imagination gave him pictures we never see. He has a faith that takes hold of something that I should like to find. When he gets to the end I expect he may see something that will carry him through. Does it never occur to you, Edwards, that this human nature of ours is a bit baffling? We don't get into the whole of it with the knife."

"Ah! I admit it, and for that matter the whole order of things in these pesky times."

With that they parted.

* * * * *

On a cot within one from Bill lay a young priest of the Roman Catholic Church who had been terribly wounded in his first battle. He was blinded, unable to speak, and for that reason was compelled to write anything that he wanted to say. At first he had been unintentionally made to feel a sort of isolation from the fact that he was a priest. While he received every attention needed there was a barrier. The sacredness of his office made the nurses a little shy of such a kindly intimacy as had so easily sprung up with Bill. When they

read his little notes they caught in a degree the patriotic spirit which had caused him to lay aside his clerical duties and volunteer for service in the ranks. When he was gone what he had written was gathered up, and some fragments may be permitted to go the way of this story for the message they carry. It seems best that they should be given very much as they came from his pencil. We shall not at our best quite see all that he saw, for our vision is not yet clear of the mists, nor should it be until cleared by that other battle—the battle of life.

“I have been permitted to hear the one they call Bill very often in what he said to those with whom he spoke. At first I thought he merely repeated what he had heard in some Protestant Mission. But I soon discovered that he was of no sect or belief. He seems to be an original who can see without doctrine. For that of which he speaks all know; but do not clearly see. He escapes from much by which we are bound as a bird might fly up, and sees the Christ as a King ruling the spirits of all men. It is a beautiful vision. But is it not what the Church teaches, for does not His Holiness also bow in great meekness of spirit before the Supreme One?

What I have come to feel of this man of a very humble station in life is that he arrives at the greatest things without reason, and almost without knowledge. For after hearing him now these many weeks I know that he speaks of what we all acknowledge and confess as of that which is taking place before his eyes. He does not vary or change. In all he is consistent. But I have never, even in the holiest of saints, observed that they in the same way have seemed to see the Kingdom of God, as one might say in operation. Is it a gift of vision? Or is it merely the use of a faith so simple that it finds the way of the Holy Apostles?

I have no longer much strength. But as bodily weakness comes upon me much that I have not seen before appears as if made bright in the darkness. Can it be that I now see by some aided light?

Here in the darkness when they make it so that we may all sleep I hear men whisper the Sacred Name as no other word is spoken. It is mingled with the names of those at home whom they love. Sometimes in the stress of great pain I hear it as when in desperation one would cry out for a friend long forgotten. Yesterday not many cots away a man in great suffering loudly

uttered the Sacred Name in blasphemy. When a hint was gently given that he was doing this, not only was he subdued; but he asked forgiveness of those about him, and in great humility. He later again spoke of what I believe was true when he said he had not meant to use that name hatefully.

Is there not everywhere a deep undercurrent of affection? Is there not in the roughest and most untaught of men a subconscious respect which is little less than love, and only comes above the threshold when the deeper feeling is forced up?

These are the thoughts of the night. The thoughts of the day are more difficult. It is then that I must fly to the simplicity of the faith of Bill. It is then that I cry out to God to know whether this beautiful faith can be found only by the breaking of our idols in this most terrible war."

* * * * *

One morning Bill awakened and lay for some time without speaking. It was that depressing hour when human vitality sags—the hour of chilling darkness before the dawn of which patient watchers know so well. A nurse who had been with him a great deal was waiting near. She knew that he was awake, but she lingered, hoping

that he would fall asleep again. When he moved as if trying to sit up, she came to him. She thought he might have been dreaming, and asked if anything had disturbed him. For a moment he did not reply, as if he were waiting for his mind to clear. Then he smiled and said, "'E's gittin' up, ain't 'E?"

"Not yet, it's not near morning."

"But 'E is. I sees 'Im. There now, you sees 'Im, too, don't yer?"

"Yes, Bill, I see it too."

He looked at her intently and then laughed as best he could, evidently knowing that she was humoring him.

"It ain't no sun as I sees. It's 'Im. 'E's comin' up as the sun of a mornin'. There's mists, too, as of a mornin', but 'E's gittin' above 'em. They'll all see now when 'E shines out."

"I hope so, Bill."

"Sure! They'll all fall down afore 'Im, an' then it'll be different."

"I hope so. Heaven knows we all need it."

"'E's shinin' in 'ere now, ain't 'E?"

"In you. I think He is."

"In all. 'E's gittin' us all the time."

"It is different. Since you have come we are all different. There is no doubt about

that. You have made it easier for all of us. We have learned to be a little more patient and willing."

"They all will be when they sees 'Im."

"Oh, Bill, I don't understand. I don't understand at all. But as you say, I'm willing. We want to do the best we can, but don't you see, we are not like you."

The poor mortal who was hovering on the verge of the great mystery hunched himself up a little on his cot, as if to gain some advantage in what he wanted to say. But when he had done this he settled down again, as if giving up; but his face changed to surprise. He opened his mouth, leaning forward, held between the effect of what he was looking at, and his eagerness to describe it. With mute signs, and then reaching out his hand quickly and nervously, he tried to bring the nurse to look with him. Whatever it was that he saw, or from whatever source the picture may have been formed, it was real to him. His eyes caught some radiance. It held him rapt and comforted till the morning broke.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 021 547 605 4